

How to Raise an Optimistic Human in a Pessimistic World



If you're raising kids today, it can be easy to focus on the negative. And it's no wonder: Thanks to the 24-hour news cycle, social media, cell phone notifications — and even sources you wouldn't expect, like Instagram and YouTube — kids are immersed in doom and gloom. Consider their world: The suicide rate is up, cyberbullying is rampant, the United States is more divided than ever, and people are now live-streaming murder and suicide. So it's understandable if you don't feel like putting on a happy face every day and keeping your kids optimistic about the future.

But don't give up. Ironically, even though media and technology seem to be the cause of our collective pessimism, they're also essential for overcoming it, either by using them wisely or knowing when to put them away. Here are six ways to find the silver lining in every cloud.

Put things in perspective

When tragedy strikes somewhere in the world, we relive it every time we turn on the TV, open our social media, check our phone notifications, or walk by a supermarket newsstand trumpeting a sensationalistic headline. Parents understand that the media amplifies things for eyeballs and clicks. But kids don't necessarily get the relationships among sources, sponsors, and audience. How you respond to news makes a difference in how kids process it, too. Help your kids put things in perspective by explaining that the

loudest voices capture the most listeners. When you “right-size” things, it lessens kids’ fears and restores hope.

Talk about what you’re grateful for

Counter defeatist attitudes by nurturing your kid’s character. Strong character grounds your kids when the world feels chaotic. Take the time to share what you’re grateful for. Encourage them to persevere against obstacles and to have compassion for others. Research shows that expressing gratitude actually makes people feel optimistic.

Fight fake news

A lot of kids say they can’t tell the difference between what’s real and fake online. Confusion, doubt, lack of trust — these things get in the way of being optimistic. But kids have the tools to fight fake news. They can use online fact-checking tools to discover the truth (or at least uncover the fraud). They can refuse to contribute to the spread of false information by not sharing stuff they can’t verify. And they can call out dubious claims when they see them. Taking fact-checking into your own hands is empowering.

Stand up to cyberbullies

Teach your kid that the buck stops with them. When they see someone getting bullied — and it happens all the time in texts, on social media, and in online games — they shouldn’t just stand by. While they should never do anything that would endanger themselves, they can do a lot to assert their support of others. They can call out cyberbullies, report them, stand up for the victim, or just private-message the victim and tell them someone cares. It’s not tattling. It’s truly everyone’s responsibility to keep the internet a positive, productive place. Standing up to cyberbullies shows you believe you can make a change.

Stamp out hate speech

Online anonymity can have some unintended consequences. For example, people think they can spew hateful language or share insulting images without fear of being discovered. That may be, but hate speech is not a victimless offense. While institutions are beginning to punish those who spread abusive material, no one should wait until that happens. Hate speech hurts people, contributes to an overall negative environment, and is sometimes a cry for help from someone in crisis. Explain how to handle hate speech: Don’t respond to it, block people who do it, report offenders, and don’t share it. If your kid can influence only one person to knock off the negative stuff, then they’ll influence someone else, and they’ll influence someone else, and they’ll ...

Tune out the world for a while

Grab your kids, grab your spouse if you have one, and shut everything else down. If they’re all there with you, you won’t miss anything. Simply being together, whether it’s to read, have a device-free dinner, or talk about an issue recharges you and sends your kids the message that family time takes precedence over everything else. Experts recommend this kind of self-care because the buildup of bad news can be overwhelming and even

debilitating. And if that's how adults feel, imagine how kids are reacting to the constant barrage. By managing your media and reclaiming your family time, you show your kids what's really important.

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